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## Exploring Student Historical Understandings: Multiple Perspectives in Social Studies Education

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This action research study focuses on examining high school students' conceptions of history and historical knowledge, as well as exploring the potential impact of incorporating multiple perspectives into teaching history on freshman students' perceptions of history. A quasi-experimental research design that utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection was applied to two Civics classes in an urban high school. The key measures are a pre and posttest structure and a historical perceptions survey for both the control (six students) and intervention groups. I provided multiple perspectives and differing evidence on one historical object in each of the two intervention lessons for the intervention group of nine students. Although there were no significant quantitative results in the intervention groups' historical perceptions survey, qualitative findings suggest changes in individual students' understandings of the existence of multiple evidence-based historical narratives, especially immediately after the intervention lessons. A larger sample size in addition to more explicit connections between the intervention lessons and students' overall perceptions of history would be able to provide more insight into the possible influence of such interventions on student perceptions of history.

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As American society morphs and changes, scholars are once again attempting to answer one of the most important questions in social studies – “what is history?” This question has materialized as conflict over what is taught in schools, who is monumentalized, and what perspectives are valued. On January 18, 2021, *The 1776 Report* - published in the final days of the Trump administration - contributed to this debate. The report asserts that its purpose is to prepare the “rising generation to understand the history and principles of the founding of the United States in 1776 and to strive to form a more perfect Union” through a “unifying” history focused on a shared American identity (The President’s Advisory 1776 Commission, 2021). This quote reveals one position in the debate over defining history: history as a nationalistic foundational myth constructed

through purposeful selection of what is deemed most useful to this construct. The report emphasizes that Americans need only to look at the facts and they will come to a common understanding of the history of the United States. This report falls in line with the tradition of history described by Gounari (2008), which is defined by basic historical facts and a “homogeneous and non-threatening narrative of U.S. history.” which aims at eliminating criticality and replacing it with a passive acceptance (p. 99). This singular version of history is well-known, as it is often the most common version found in our mass media and history textbooks. Such a version of history is deeply rooted in an understanding of history as simply one objective, true story that can be memorized and recited and is essential in the maintenance and reproduction of the social order, as it offers no critiques or alternatives. Yet, to imagine a better future, we must be aware of the complexities of the past, practice critically assessing our world, and expose ourselves to the different realities that exist beyond the stories of those in power. Equipping students to do so involves exploring their own understandings of what history is and exploring ways history teachers can guide students towards an understanding of history that includes complexities and multiple truths, as well as a recognition that history is not an objective, unbiased account of the past. I believe that this knowledge and understanding is essential to successful participation in a pluralistic society.

The awareness of the realities of history beyond the dominant stories, realities filled with diverse perspectives, interpretations, evidence and lived experiences, can allow us as a society to embrace the totality of the human experience more fully. It is by providing students access to a wider diversity of knowledge and the tools to analyze this knowledge that we can prepare them to navigate our world of limitless information. This study focuses on two key questions: “What are students’ conceptions of history and historical knowledge?” and “Does incorporating multiple perspectives on the same historical object affect students’ historical perceptions?” The exploration of these questions may be a resource for the construction of history curriculums by history teachers and administrators.

The purpose of this study is to examine high school student conceptions of history and historical knowledge and to explore the influence that incorporating multiple perspectives into teaching history may have on student perceptions of history. Previous research examined students’ conceptions of history and attempted to make an impact on these conceptions through an addition of a two-week unit, which culminated in a debate. O’Neill, Guloy, and Sensoy (2014) aimed to identify if smaller additions to the history curriculum, such as lessons that incorporate multiple perspectives or interpretations on the same historical subject, could impact students’ perceptions of history while exploring their

developing historical conceptions during the lessons. While O’Neill et. al (2014) did not give the comparison group the survey a second time, I did so in my research to ensure test-retest reliability. Finally, similar to the researchers’ concept of “metahistorical conceptions” (O’Neill, Guloy, and Sensoy, 2014), this research focuses on student understandings of history. Conceptions, perceptions, and understandings are used interchangeably in this paper to mean what a person believes history is, the way they believe history is interpreted, and how they make sense of differing historical accounts. I completed my study in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, teaching and learning occurred online through Google Meets. It is important to note that this learning situation may have affected on students’ learning and therefore the results of this study.

## **Literature Review**

This literature review will conceptualize multiperspectivity, review evidence of the common teaching methods within the high school history class, provide arguments for using multiple perspectives in teaching history, and explore the conceptions of objectivity and truth that may be shaped by different history teaching methods.

### **Multiperspectivity**

The concept of multiperspectivity within history points to the recognition that multiple historical perspectives of events, individuals, and groups can coexist (Wansink, Akkerma, Zuiker, & Wubbels, 2018). Exploring diverse interpretations of and narratives about different aspects of history is a core aspect of the work of historians (Wansink et al., 2018). Multiperspectivity is one element that can make up how people understand both the creation and interpretation of history, which O’Neill, Guloy, and Sensoy (2014) define as “metahistorical conceptions” (p. 1). These perceptions of what history is can also be understood as the “epistemic cognition in history” (Maggioni, VanSledright, & Alexander, 2009, p. 189). Epistemic cognition is the mental process used for assessing what knowledge is, how it is arrived at, and what its limits are (Maggioni et al., 2009). In the context of history this may include considerations such as “the role of the historian” and “the relation between history and the past” that are often unconsciously decided by students and teachers alike (Maggioni et al., 2009, p. 189).

Understanding students’ historical conceptions can be key to deepening their learning and developing of their historical thinking and historical literacy (Maggioni et al., 2009 & Nokes, 2013). Historical literacy is the ability to engage critically with historical texts and narratives, to construct meaning from them, and to develop informed interpretations of history (Nokes, 2013). Aspects of historical literacy have

recently become central to history education in the United States, as seen in their manifestation within the Common Core Standards for History/Social Studies (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

## **Multiperspectivity in History**

Wansink, Akkerma, Zuiker, and Wubbels (2018) define three different “temporal layers” or time-related versions of multiperspectivity, which are reflective of the ways that multiperspectivity exists within and outside of the classroom (p. 497). The first layer, “in the past,” refers to differing perspectives of people who are of the period under study, often seen through primary sources that offer diverse perspectives on what individuals are experiencing. The next layer, “between past and present,” includes differing interpretations about a historical object (event, figure, phenomenon) that are formed after the fact, such as different historians or communities’ narratives about a historical event. The final temporal layer is “in the present” which refers to the diverse interpretations of those existing in the present moment toward historical objects. This third temporal layer is useful for situating classmates and teachers’ perspectives of history and considering the social, cultural, and individual contexts that inform those (Wansink et al., 2018, p. 497-498).

## **Philosophical Considerations**

Multiperspectivity in itself represents an epistemic position that rejects positivist notions of objectivity and a single “Truth,” instead placing an emphasis on multiple coexisting truths. Yet, multiperspectivity is not a framework of vulgar relativism where anything goes and all truths are equally valid. In consideration of historians’ “habits of mind,” one of which is “holding interpretations as tentative” while not considering all interpretations as equally valid, we can recognize that neither one of these binary conceptions of history is accurate (Nokes, 2013, p. 260). Some authors critique the argument for the socially constructed notion of truth by equating it to statements such as “there is no legitimate basis for privileging one point of view over another” (Botstein as cited in Loewen, 2018, xviii). However, if we return to the historians’ habits of mind, we find that while they always remain open to different interpretations, they weigh them based on their supporting evidence (Nokes, 2013). In this way, we can understand multiperspectivity as an epistemological framework that argues the existence of “multiple coexisting narratives about particular historical events” which are rooted in evidence as opposed to an objective single narrative (Wansink et al., 2018, p. 496).

Postmodernism is relevant to the definition of multiperspectivity as an epistemological framework and the conceptions of history that arise

from it. Postmodernism emphasizes the rejection of objective reality, while recognizing the possibility of arriving at something similar: inter-subjectivity. In the context of a historical object, it is possible to reach inter-subjectivity through an aggregation of diverse interpretations to create a multi-faceted understanding. Multiperspectivity also relates to the postmodernist rejection of metanarratives, as it seeks to replace single narratives with multiple coexisting ones (Wansink et al., 2018). The postmodernist critique of metanarratives argues that they seek to emphasize similarity and disguise difference (Noddings, 2016). This critique mirrors the beliefs of thinkers that criticize the often-taught version of history in classrooms in the United States:

a homogenous and non-threatening narrative of U.S. history, one that has been sterilized from racial conflicts, gender tensions, and subjugated histories, has been essential to the reproduction of a culture of consensus where citizens passively and uncritically accept the fateful relationship of their country to the rest of the world (Gounari, 2008, p. 99).

The function of these one-perspective dominant narratives is often as tools to construct national identity, establish the nation as the protagonist, and create a common culture (Alphen & Carretero, 2015 & Gounari, 2008).

## Teaching Methods and Practices

Previous research demonstrates that history/social studies classes use textbooks at higher rates compared to all other subjects, especially within American history classrooms, although textbooks rarely have updated information (Wakefield, 2006; Loewen, 2018). James W. Loewen (2018) read twelve of the most commonly used history textbooks for his first edition of *Lies My Teacher Told Me* in 1995 and an additional six textbooks for the second edition. In his research, Loewen (2018) found that most of these textbooks included some false information, identified different theories as facts, and presented a single version of history as the truth. Textbooks mostly present a single narrative of historical events, representing history as a series of indisputable facts (O'Neill et al., 2014). This method of teaching history supports the positivist worldview of objective truth and the “traditional” perspective of history as a fixed and closed collection of facts (Gounari, 2008). The questions asked within the textbook assess students’ acquisition of knowledge based on their ability to provide the “correct” answer.

In the United States, programs that promote the teaching of this “traditional” history, such as the *Teaching American History* program, often only support the teaching of a history that is reflective of the “institutionally sanctioned official version” or the dominant narrative (Gounari, 2008, p. 99). These master narratives or “official” versions

often are deeply influential on history textbooks and curriculum. A study reviewed nine American history high school textbooks and their coverage of 9/11 and the War on Terror by using research questions to assess what the textbook taught about the events (Romanowski, 2009). For the five questions asked, each textbook had clear omissions of knowledge and evidence-based perspectives of historians (Romanowski, 2009). Romanowski (2009) argues that these omissions in history textbooks shape the possible perspectives through which students can interpret a historical object and influence the way that students perceive the United States. Research that examines the intended purpose of national histories—“to foster social cohesion and national identities”— supports this argument of limited student perspectives (Alphen & Carretero, 2015, p. 515).

The high usage of textbooks reveals that the inclusion of a multi-perspective history is not a key element of the materials in history classes in the U.S. As a result, it is commonly left up to the teacher to incorporate multiple perspectives on historical events by incorporating both sources and historical explanations outside of what the textbook provides (Wansink, Akkerma., Zuiker, & Wubbels, 2018). Yet, there is evidence that history classrooms use non-textbook print materials less than other core subjects (Wakefield, 2006). As a result, this study intends on teaching a history unit using sources outside of textbooks, which provide differing perspectives on a historical object. One consideration around textbooks is their function within different history classes. Most research on textbook usage simply asks whether it is used but does not explore the ways they are used. There is value in using the textbook as a tool to uncover dominant perspectives and examine biases. Loewen (2018) suggests critiquing textbooks through a framework of questions that center historical literacy skills such as sourcing and corroboration.

To push students beyond an understanding of history as one “True” story based on a collection of facts, I believe that the incorporation of multiple perspectives is necessary. An engagement with multiple perspectives can be the incorporation of multiple secondary sources presenting diverse interpretations of a historical object, the inclusion of historical figures often erased from the dominant narrative, and multiple primary sources that provide evidence for differing perspectives on a historical object. In addition to guiding students beyond conceptions of history as a single narrative of objective facts, the use of multiple perspectives in history may be a method for creating historical empathy, defined as the ability to take the perspectives of others (Morgan, 2015).

A research study found that students could successfully learn using multiple sources and that multiple sources could support students in developing the skills of historians (i.e., of historical literacy) (Nokes, Dole & Hacker, 2007). This study used four different interventions:



textbooks and content instruction, textbooks and historical literacy skill instruction, multiple sources and content instruction, and multiple sources and historical literacy skill instruction (Nokes et al. 2007). The results found that of the groups that used multiple sources, both those who received historical literacy instruction and those who did not, scored higher on content knowledge and used historical literacy skills more often (Nokes et al, 2007). This supports that the use of multiple texts plays an important role in the development of historical literacy skills, as solely instructing students on these skills did not lead to similar development. While there is significant theory to support the value of teaching history using multiple perspectives, such as Nokes (2013) and Nokes et al. (2007), there is significantly less research on how this process can affect student perceptions of history. Instead, the research simply focuses on whether or not teachers use multiple perspectives (Wansink, Akkerma, Zuiker, & Wubbels, 2018). Other relevant research examines how teaching a unit about the atomic bomb through multiple perspectives affects student achievement through a pre and posttest (Doppen, 2000). This study revealed that students' content knowledge about the use of the atomic bomb increased, as did their ability to provide multiple causes for its use (Doppen, 200). The connection between multiple perspectives and achievement is important in establishing support for the need to incorporate this method into history classrooms, but there is also a major need for understanding the influence of it on their conceptions of history. This gap in research led me to investigating the impact that incorporating multiple perspectives can have on student historical conceptions.

## **Historical conceptions**

The work of O'Neill, Guloy, and Sensoy (2014), which explores the connections between specific teaching practices and student meta-historical conceptions, provides the Historical Accounts Difference (HAD) survey that I adapted to developing my own investigation. Their research uses a design similar to mine as they gave students a survey, had them engage in a unit intended to change students' meta-historical conceptions, and then gave them the survey again to measure any changes. This research also included a comparison group that did not engage in the intervention as a way to ensure that the implementation group did not have unique meta-historical conceptions that would influence the results of the study (O'Neill et al., 2014). The unit used as the intervention included student research using primary sources to explore the question "Has Canada become a more compassionate country in the last 100 years?" (O'Neill et al., 2014, p. 4). Students explored seven different events, crafted to elicit different opinions to the essential question, and then engaged in a debate on the question as a class. This method was used

as a way to create “dissatisfaction with their existing understanding of a phenomenon [as a way] to be open to developing a new one” around their opinions on the question (O’Neill et al, 2014, p. 4). Pushing students to reconcile that their classmates may have differing perspectives based in evidence may lead them to recognize that there can be multiple valid historical interpretations. While this method was effective for its intended research focus, one of my key goals is to examine whether incorporating multiple perspectives into single history lessons can affect a student’s conception. Integrating multiperspectivity into individual lessons is a key focus because any history teacher can easily incorporate this into their curriculum, whereas incorporating a much longer project may not be feasible. As such, my research will use the whole class instruction to present differing historical interpretations and primary source evidence in the form of two lessons.

In summary, the research I reviewed outlines my key concept of multiperspectivity and supports the notion that students’ experiences in history classes can affect their conceptualization of history. Engaging in purposeful activities and teaching methods that incorporate multiple perspectives can challenge the “traditional” conceptions of history by revealing that the dominant narrative or “official” historical account is not the only account. The literature reviewed showed that multiperspectivity and the skills associated with it are representative of historians’ mindsets for engaging with history. This study will explore the students’ experience of grappling with multiple perspectives on the same historical object and will examine whether this experience has an impact on their meta-historical conceptualizations.

## **Methodology**

The purpose of this study is to examine high school student conceptions of history and historical knowledge and to explore the influence that incorporating multiple perspectives into teaching history may have on student perceptions of history.

## **Context**

This research study took place in a Civics class within a selective enrollment high school in an urban Midwestern environment. The population of the school is 98% students of color, with a majority of Black students. Classes occurred online through Google Meets due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A key challenge of this teaching format is that students did not have their cameras on, making it more difficult to assess their levels of engagement and understanding, and this undoubtedly has implications for the study’s results. I was the student teacher in the classroom and taught each of the two intervention lessons and the non-

intervention lessons on the same historical topics. The study sample was a sample of convenience, as I had access to the students and control over the methods of teaching the content. I chose two Civics classes that were relatively comparable in terms of academic achievement and met at the same time of day on alternating days. The test group of this study was initially 52 students. Of these 52 students, 15 completed all necessary components, 6 in the comparison group and 9 in the intervention group. Many students did not return accurately completed parental consent forms or were absent on both intervention lesson days. Of the students who turned in completed parental consent forms and were present, the number of participants was narrowed to those who engaged in at least one intervention lesson. Engagement is defined as privately responding to at least 1 question throughout the lesson using the Peardeck platform.

## Data Collection

The instrument used to measure students' historical perceptions was a survey designed through a process of workshopping with other researchers, my research advisor, and other colleagues. I piloted the survey two times. Seventeen people took the first version of the survey. Their responses and feedback supported the process of refining the questions. Three people took the final version. Their responses ensured that the questions elicited the type of responses I was looking for. The instrument, given to students through Google Forms, included short answer questions and five-point Likert scale questions. The Likert scale responses ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The short answer questions provided additional nuanced understanding of the students' conceptions of history and historical knowledge, which the Likert scale items could not provide. The Likert scale items provide a basis for analyzing whether the intervention had an influence on students' conceptions through a paired sample t-test.

The two classes took the survey twice. The intervention group took the survey before and after the two intervention lessons. The comparison group took the survey twice, each time on the same day as the intervention group. Both classes took the survey the first time the last week of February and the second time in early April, 2021. Students had time in class and absent students had four days to respond.

The two intervention lessons included multiple perspectives on the same historical object. Each of these lessons were constructed to show students that multiple interpretations of the same historical object could be evidence-based. At the close of each of the lesson, students responded to reflection questions about the multiple interpretation they had encountered or created. The first lesson was taught on March 3, 2021. I presented two historical interpretations on what was driving the Federalists position

in the Federalist/Anti-Federalist debate. One perspective focused on the Federalists as wanting to ensure the protection of the ideals of the Declaration of Independence and the liberty won in the Revolutionary War, while the other focused on the Federalists as wanting to protect their own economic self-interests. Students read different interpretations and primary source evidence that supported each interpretation. At the end of the lesson, I asked students “Why do you think there are such different interpretations of the Federalists?” and “Can both interpretations be correct? Why or why not?”

I taught the second intervention lesson late in March 2021. It centered on the women’s suffrage movement in the United States and provided students multiple primary sources from this movement. Students created their own historical interpretations of the women’s suffrage movement using two groups of primary sources. The two groups provided evidence for different interpretations of the movement: one of a movement united around the fight for women’s rights and the other of a movement with many internal conflicts due to race. At the end of the lesson, I asked students “We looked at two different primary source sets (#1 and #2) & (#3, #4, & #5), which provided evidence for very different interpretations of the women’s suffrage movement. Can both of our interpretations be correct? Why or why not?” For both lessons the reflection questions were not discussed, but students were given time in class to answer them individually. These post-lesson reflection responses are a key part of the qualitative analysis, allowing me to explore student’s developing historical perceptions immediately after the intervention lessons.

## **Data Analysis and Results**

### **Quantitative Analysis**

The historical perception survey included 12 five-point Likert scale responses. Two Likert-scale statements (“History is relevant to your life” and “History is interesting”) that did not relate to student historical perceptions were not used in data analysis. Ten items were related to student historical perceptions. These were coded, six of which were reverse-coded, into a 1 to 5 scale of historical perceptions. For coding, 1 represents a closed and static understanding of history and 5 represents an open and dynamic understanding of history. An independent sample *t*-test was conducted to compare the group’s pretest historical perception scores in the intervention lessons and no-intervention lessons conditions. The nine students who received the interventions lessons ( $M = 3.22$ ,  $SD = .338$ ) compared to the six students in the comparison group ( $M = 3.433$ ,  $SD = .468$ ) demonstrated no significant difference in their pretest historical perception scores,  $t(13) = 1.02$ ,  $p = .327$  (Table 1). Thus, we are

able to reasonably compare the changes in scores of these two groups in connection with the intervention lessons.

For each class the means of each of the two sets of student surveys were compared to see if there was a change. A paired sample *t*-test was conducted to compare the group's pretest historical perception scores in the intervention lessons and no-intervention lessons conditions. The difference between the pre and posttest means of the comparison group was .05 in the positive direction (Table 2). As seen on Table 3 the pre/post change for the comparison group that was observed was not significant ( $t(5) = .59, p = .580$ ). This provides evidence for test-retest reliability. The difference between the pre and posttest means of the intervention group was -.09 in the negative direction, meaning there was a slight decline on the historical perceptions scale (Table 4). As seen on Table 5 the pre/post change for the intervention group was also not significant ( $t(8) = -.61, p = .561$ ). The conditions for a paired sample *t*-test were not met; therefore, conclusions cannot be drawn from this test. For a larger sample, I believe this analysis could be more fruitful.

### **Qualitative Analysis**

The instrument included four short answer questions, two of which related to the students' historical perceptions. I coded and analyzed the students' responses from these short answer questions and the post-lesson reflection questions. I inductively coded the responses using a combination of in-vivo coding and open coding. Next, I sorted these codes into two themes, representing the two ends of the spectrum of the historical perception scale: "open and dynamic" and "closed and static." Finally, I created categories for the two post-lesson questions, which asked if two historical interpretations could be correct. This was done to organize the responses based on yes or no and the reasons supporting this response. The coding structure is included in Appendix C.

**Historical Perception Survey.** The short answer prompt, "Describe what history is to you," provided insight into how students conceptualized history. In the pretest, there were eight occurrences of the "closed and static" theme. A representative example of this theme is "what has happened in the past." There were five occurrences of the "open and dynamic" theme, represented by responses such as "history is evidence of the past" and "leads up to the present day," which show an understanding of history that is beyond simply the events of the past. The posttest decreased to six occurrences of the "closed and static" theme. It remained at five occurrences of the "open and dynamic" theme, but they included new elements such as "the study of the past" and "events written down."

The short answer question, "How do historians interpret (make sense of) history?" provided insight into student conceptions on how history is

shaped and created. In the pretest, the “closed and static” theme occurred six times, represented by responses such as “they talked about things that happened in history” and “they take quotes from past evidence such as books, letters, etc.” The “open and dynamic” theme occurred two times, represented by responses such as “people can interpret things in different ways” and “by breaking apart big pieces and trying to understand them individually.” The posttest decreased to five occurrences of the “closed and static” themes, represented by responses such as “by using primary and secondary sources.” There was an increase to three occurrences of the “open and dynamic” theme represented by responses such as “evaluating many sources” and “use facts they do know and sum it up to something they think that might had (sic) happened.”

**Post-Lesson Reflection Questions.** The post-lesson reflection questions were coded to provide a deeper understanding of how students understood multiple interpretations of history immediately after the intervention lessons. The lesson #1 reflection question, “Why do you think there are such different historical interpretations of the Federalists?” elicited one occurrence of the “closed and static” theme, represented by “different people have different opinions of them.” There were seven occurrences of the “open and dynamic” theme. Examples of this theme are “different point of views on their goals and them as the people” and “different views based on what occurred and how it affected them.”

The lesson #1 reflection question of “Can both historical interpretations be correct? Why or why not?” elicited two occurrences of the “closed and static” theme, represented by the response “history is just different peoples [sic] opinions” and “there can really only be one specific correct interpretation especially with how strongly the 2 interpretation [sic] contrast with each other.” There were six occurrences of the “open and dynamic” theme, represented by responses such as “the facts in both of them can be true” and “if there are enough facts and evidence to back up those interpretations, then they could still be valid.”

The lesson #2 reflection question, “We looked at two different primary source sets (#1 and #2) & (#3, #4, & #5), which provided evidence for very different interpretations of the women’s suffrage movement. Can both of our interpretations be correct? Why or why not?” resulted in two occurrences of the “closed and static” theme, represented by the responses “no, they seem like they’re fighting got the same thing but its [sic] different, so no” and “people can have their own opinions on things.” The “open and dynamic” theme had six occurrences represented by responses such as “people could interpret things differently” and “it was proof that the women’s suffrage movement strictly focused on women, but it was also evident that this movement was disconnected to women/men of color that faced and still faces [sic] even more discrimination.”

## Discussion

The results of the paired sample *t*-test for the intervention group showed no significant changes between the pretest and posttest historical perception scores of students. Although this is not surprising considering the small sample size and the duration of each lesson. Understanding these results in their context may help provide a deeper awareness of possible factors that affected them. First, student learning during the Covid-19 pandemic is not reflective of student learning prior to the pandemic. My students have experienced loss of family members, loss of social interactions, and a major disruption to their lives. These changes are occurring during an extremely challenging time of their lives: high school. Mental health and emotions play a significant role on people's ability to engage deeply with information and knowledge. Next, learning from home includes many distractions and, often, little supervision. Students may not be engaged throughout the entirety of the lesson, which could influence their integration of knowledge. Additionally, the intervention lessons were focused on the element of the historical perception survey revolving around multiple perspectives and multiple true stories. While I hypothesized that a shift in students' understanding of this element could generalize to a shift in their overall understanding of history, this may not be correct. As a result, students may need to engage in lessons and discussions around each of the elements of the historical perception survey for there to be a significant impact on their overall scores.

The qualitative data provided insight into how students understanding of history developed and changed between the pretest and posttest. For example, the change between the pretest and posttest on the "Describe what history is to you" prompt shows a decrease in responses that are characterized by the "closed and static" theme, which provides evidence that students definitions of history shifted toward the open and dynamic side. Another key change was the diversification of the components that made up the "open and dynamic" theme. This reveals that while there may not have been an increase in responses representing this theme, students did expand their understanding of an open and dynamic version of history. I believe it is just as important for students to move away from a closed and static understanding of history as it is for those with an open and dynamic understanding to expand their understandings. The data shows me that students experienced both. The comparison of the pre and posttest data on the "How do historians interpret (make sense of) history?" question shows an increased occurrence and expansion of the "open and dynamic" theme into new examples. This reveals an increase in an understanding of the key element of evidence: sources are not just used but analyzed. This shift shown by some students may have been influenced by the intervention lessons, as they engaged in the analysis of sources

and explicitly made the connection between historical interpretations and supporting evidence.

The post-lesson reflection questions provided interesting evidence that students were much more likely to respond in a way that represented an open and dynamic understanding of history immediately after the intervention lessons. It is important to consider the possible reasons for why these perspectives were not as strongly represented on the posttest historical perception survey. Students may not have generalized the insights gained from the intervention lessons into their overall historical perceptions. This could be evidence that there needs to be a stronger connection between these elements. Making the mental jump from the existence of multiple evidence-based historical interpretations to an understanding of history as narratives of the past may not be as seamless as I previously hypothesized. This also shows that even when students experienced and accepted perspectives that conflicted with their own, many did not integrate them and alter their previous understandings. This could be a representation of how deeply entrenched people's beliefs about what history is and how it is interpreted.

The quantitative analysis did not show any significant change in the historical perceptions of students, which reveals that two lessons might not be enough to make the significant impact as hypothesized. Yet, taken as a whole, student responses on the post-lesson reflection questions and the posttest historical perception survey revealed important changes from the pretest historical perception responses. The changes show a deeper thought process on what history is, such as “the study of the past” and on how historians interpret history, for example “evaluating primary sources.” The post-lesson reflection questions reveal a developing and complex student understanding of multiple evidence-based interpretations, represented by “both historical interpretations can be correct because the facts in both of them can be true” and “people have different views based on what occurred and how it affected them.” These changes show that there is value in teaching students lessons that include differing interpretations and evidence, as well as having them reflect on these lessons. While the lessons may not be a quick means-to-an-end of shifting student historical perceptions, they can be part of a longer process of students reflecting on these perceptions and slowly developing them through multiple experiences.

## **Conclusion**

The questions this research study attempted to answer were “What are students’ perceptions on history and historical knowledge” and “Does incorporating multiple perspectives on the same historical object affect students’ historical perceptions?” This study was successful in providing



insight into evolving students' perception of history and historical knowledge. While the quantitative data did not provide support for the second questions, the qualitative data gave a more nuanced response. Based on the findings and discussion, I believe there is value in teaching students history through the incorporation of multiple perspectives, even if it does not lead to an immediate change in their understanding of history. This framework of teaching history has benefit in itself: exposing students to the "true" nature of history.

In the future, I plan to continue implementing multiple perspectives into my history teaching and advocating for this to be included in all history curriculums. I would like to continue investigating the influence these lessons might have on student historical perceptions by considering the following changes and ideas. First, both whole-class discussion and individual reflection after such lessons may make the lessons' impact on students' overall understanding of history stronger. Next, comparing these multiple interpretations with a textbook that offers only one dominant narrative perspective can be useful to engage students in the difference between the two ends of the spectrum: "open and dynamic" and "closed and static." It is important to consider whether this type of history teaching should be included in middle school, as students' understanding of history may already be deeply ingrained by high school. Finally, changing a person's historical metacognitive beliefs may be a long process that necessitates a greater integration of multiple perspectives throughout entire history course content. While transforming entire course curriculums is a challenging task, it is important to recognize the impact such a change can have; the increase in empathetic critical thinkers who recognize that the most well-known narrative is not the only "True" one.

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## Appendix A

### Historical Perception Survey

When answering these questions think about history in general, not the school subject.

1. Describe what history is to you
2. Are you interested in history?
3. If yes, why? If no, why not?
4. Do you believe that history is relevant to your life?
5. If yes, why? If no, why not?
6. How do historians interpret (make sense of) history?

Rate each statement using a Likert scale (1 through 5). 1 = Strongly Disagree, 3 = Neutral, and 5 = Strongly Agree

1. History is relevant to your life
2. History is interesting
3. Different perspectives on a historical event can be equally acceptable
4. There is usually more than one true story about an event in history
5. What we know about an event in history is not influenced by our values and beliefs of today
6. There can be multiple perspectives on why something happened in history, but only one can be right
7. Before we accept/believe the interpretation of any historical event, we need to first understand the views of the interpreters
8. To understand why something happened in history, all you need are the historical facts
9. If there is enough information about a historical event, everyone would come to the same conclusion about how and why that event happened
10. History is just a combination of facts, dates, & events
11. History is another name for the past
12. History is another name for stories about the past

## Appendix B

Table 1. *Independent Samples Test for Pretest Scores*

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df				Lower	Upper
Score Before	Equal variances assumed	.628	.442	1.019	13	.327	.21111	.20718	-.23648	.65870
	Equal variances not assumed			.952	8.455	.367	.21111	.22172	-.29543	.71766

Table 2. *Comparison Group Paired Samples Descriptive Statistics*

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Score Before	3.4333	6	.46762	.19090
	Score After	3.4833	6	.54924	.22423

Table 3. *Comparison Group Paired Samples Test*

		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Score Before - Score After	.05000	.20736	.08466	-.16762	.26762	.591	5	.580

Table 4. *Intervention Group Paired Samples Descriptive Statistics*

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Score Before MP Lessons	3.2222	9	.33830	.11277
	Score After MP Lessons	3.1333	9	.44441	.14814

Table 5. *Intervention Group Paired Samples Test*

		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Score Before MP Lessons - Score After MP Lessons	-.08889	.44001	.14667	-.42711	.24933	-.606	8	.561

## Appendix C

### Coding Structure in Qualitative Analysis

#### Historical Perception Survey

*Describe what history is to you*

##### Pretest

Themes	Codes
Closed and static (8 occurrences)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The past</li> </ul>
Open and dynamic (5 occurrences)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remembrance</li> <li>• Connection to the present</li> <li>• Evidence of the past</li> </ul>

##### Posttest

Themes	Codes
Closed and static (6 occurrences)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The past</li> </ul>
Open and dynamic (5 occurrences)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The study of the past</li> <li>• Narratives</li> <li>• Impact</li> </ul>

#### *How do historians interpret (makes sense of) history?*

##### Pretest

Themes	Codes
Closed and static (6 occurrences)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of evidence</li> <li>• Studying</li> <li>• Sharing knowledge</li> </ul>
Open and dynamic (2 occurrences)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different interpretations</li> <li>• Deconstructing</li> </ul>

##### Posttest

Themes	Codes
Closed and static (5 occurrences)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of evidence</li> </ul>
Open and dynamic (3 occurrences)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analyzing sources</li> <li>• Fact-based hypothesis</li> </ul>

**Post-Lesson Reflection Questions***Why do you think there are such different historical interpretations of the Federalists?*

Themes	Codes
Closed and static (1 occurrence)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Opinions</li> </ul>
Open and dynamic (7 occurrences)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Different interpretations</li> <li>● Different perspectives</li> <li>● Personal impact</li> </ul>

*Can both historical interpretations be correct? Why or why not?*

Themes	Categories	Codes
Closed and static (2 occurrences)	Yes: Opinions (1 occurrence)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Opinions</li> </ul>
	No: Conflict (1 occurrence)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Conflict</li> </ul>
Open and dynamic (6 occurrences)	Yes: Evidence & relationship (6 occurrences)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Different perspectives</li> <li>● Evidence-based</li> </ul>

*We looked at 2 different primary source sets (#1 and #2) & (#3, #4, & #5) which provided evidence for very different interpretations of the women's suffrage movement.**Can both of our interpretations be correct? Why or why not?*

Themes	Categories	Codes
Closed and static (1 occurrences)	No: Conflict (1 occurrence)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Conflict</li> </ul>
	Yes: Opinions (1 occurrence)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Opinions</li> </ul>
Open and dynamic (6 occurrences)	Yes: Evidence & relationship (6 occurrences)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Different perspectives</li> <li>● Evidence-based</li> </ul>



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